To Build A Fire By Jack London Essay, Research Paper

In ?To Build a Fire,? Jack London uses many details of setting to illustrate

the gravity of the protagonist?s situation. The story is a detailed

description of the dangers of intense cold and the stages involved in the

process of freezing to death. The man in ?to build a fire? is a very

dogmatic and arrogant person who believed in his own abilities and took

everything at face value. He didn?t analyze and scrutinize over every detail.

He definitely wasn?t one to philosophize and his conceptions were rooted in

the tangible not the surreal. At the end, though, he realizes his own

deficiencies and finally dies. The magnitude of the man?s situation is fully

illustrated and established through London?s descriptions of the landscape,

snow, ice, and intense cold. The height of London?s graphic portrayal is the

story?s explicit description of the intense cold of the arctic winter that the

man is travelling through. The ?sharp, explosive crackle?(pg. 119 para. 2)

that occurred in the air before the man?s spit could even hit the snow is just

an example of the vicious cold that the man was travelling through. The frozen

moisture of the man?s breathing that forms ice on his beard and mustache. The

?crystal beard of the color and solidity of amber?(pg. 120 para. 1) that

transpires when the man chews tobacco and the speed in which the man?s

appendages become numb and unusable are further examples of London?s account

of the cold. The journey through the unbroken white ?north and south, as far

as the eye could see? (paragraph 2) was another striking account of the

wonderful use of setting in this story. Without a doubt, the concept of a world

of ice is a major factor in the greatness of this story undermined only by

London?s graphic depiction of the man?s death. This is depicted in great

detail throughout the latter part of the story. The terrain of the Yukon, to the

man, is just an obstacle that could easily be overcome with knowledge of your

surroundings and a pragmatic attitude, but in truth it is the executioner of the

man. The anxiety of falling in the water, the relief when the fire is built, and

the shock when it is put out are all situations that build to the tension of the

story. The panic when he is unable to build a second fire and the conclusion

that is bound to happen are more thoroughly realized when the man is unable to

even light a match. The wild rush through the snow and the idea to kill his dog

to use its body as warmth are further graphic details of the break down of the

man. The innovation of ?meeting death with dignity?(pg.128 para. 3) is the

final stage to the man?s realization that he was to die. The idea to ?sleep

off to death?(pg.128 para. 3) and the statement, ?Freezing was not so bad as

people thought. There were lots worse ways to die.? is an additional step

towards the conclusion we had all suspected when the fire was put out. The

setting is further developed by these accounts and the harshness of the Arctic

winters are even more realized. Thus, London?s setting within the unfeeling

Yukon is both descriptive and arousing. The major action takes place after the

fire is put out, leading to the climax of the story when the man begins his

realization that death had found him. In this way, London uses setting to show

the extent of the man?s situation and the death that will surely follow if you

underestimate it. The events of the story, the unrelenting cold, and the man?s

final death are all tied together by London?s expert control of setting.